

Lake ^{May 23, 1991} quackers' delight

By **ADRIENNE TANNER**
of The Advocate

ALIX — The south-central district manager for Ducks Unlimited Canada likes Buffalo Lake the way it is.

The shallow lake and its nearby tributaries, wetlands and streams are home to thousands of waterfowl, Kim Schmitt said Wednesday.

It has one of the highest densities of breeding waterfowl in North America — a phenomenon that has drawn international attention to the area. Of a \$1.5-billion North American Waterfowl Management program, \$2 million is being spent at Buffalo Lake to boost the duck population.

Mr. Schmitt, who attended public hearings on Alberta Environment's plans to stabilize Buffalo Lake water levels, said he doesn't oppose the project.

But he wants sound assurances it won't jeopardize crucial waterfowl habitat.

Mr. Schmitt said he wants to see a detailed management plan in place before the project is approved.

"We'd like to see details of the program fine-tuned."

A government-commissioned environmental impact assessment alludes to mitigating measures that will be taken to ensure existing habitat is preserved or new habitat created.

But so far, all talk about mitigating measures has been far too vague, he said.

Mr. Schmitt's concerns were shared by environmentalist Dr. Martha Kostuch, who said the importance of the waterfowl has been undervalued.

Stabilizing Buffalo Lake may draw tourists interested in traditional lake activities such as boating, said the Rocky Mountain House veterinarian.

But eco-tourism, and more particularly bird watching, is the wave of the future. Tourism marketing should concentrate on what already exists, she said, speaking against the stabilization plan.

"Recognize and protect the natural values of the lake," Dr. Kostuch urged. People will come from kilometres around just to see an endangered species of bird like the piping plover which nests at Buffalo Lake, she said.

Mr. Schmitt agreed.